

Things We Love reveals life inside Gina Rinehart's cattle empire

- Nov 21 2018 at 10:39 PM
- Updated Nov 21 2018 at 10:40 PM



A jillaroo leads cattle on Gina Rinehart-owned Fossil Downs station in the Kimberley. *Stacey Ford*

Former school principal Annette Parker left her home on the Tasmanian coast for a remote cattle station owned by Gina Rinehart with visions of the forlorn dust bowl Faraway Downs portrayed in the hit movie *Australia*.

The reality she found on Fossil Downs in Western Australia couldn't have been more different from the stereotype of Faraway Downs and Nicole Kidman and Hugh Jackman rolling around in the dust.

"Station life sees so many diverse personalities and stories meld together for the season," she writes in a new book *Things We Love* unveiled by Mrs Rinehart's Hancock Prospecting on Wednesday night as part of its National Agriculture Day initiative.

"It is a true community where everyone has a purpose and a role, where people embrace the responsibility of contributing their bit, and where at the end of the day over a shared meal, you can joke, laugh and unwind."

The story of life today on Fossil Downs is one from more than 30 [stations, farms and feedlots in Hancock Prospecting's agriculture arm](#) that are included in *Things We Love*.

Hancock agriculture chief executive David Larkin said only 500 copies had been printed initially but a second print run was planned with all profits going to drought relief.

Mr Larkin said station and farming people told their stories in their words in *Things We Love*.

The contributors include station children, station managers, bore runners and grader drivers who are the backbone of Australia's cattle industry.

They share a slice of station life as well as favourite smoko and dinner recipes in the book.

There are contributions from former trade minister Andrew Robb, conservative media commentator Andrew Bolt and [Shanghai CRED owner Gui Guojie](#).

Sydney cruise launch

The book was launched during a sold-out Sydney harbour cruise where donated items as unlikely as time with Madonna in her London recording studio and a week on an 86-metre super yacht cruising the Mediterranean were auctioned to raise money for drought-hit farmers.

Mr Larkin said the book was in no way about Mrs Rinehart, but about people and a way of life close to her heart.

Mrs Rinehart spent her early years on a cattle station in the Pilbara where her father Lang Hancock pioneered the iron ore industry and her family boasts a long, unbroken connection with the industry.

She is a major financial backer of the Royal Flying Doctor Service and earlier this year was part of a campaign that saw WA premier Mr McGowan reverse a decision to cut School of the Air funding.

Ms Parker is a governess to four young girls on Fossil Downs, one of the most historic and geographically spectacular cattle stations in Australia.

Covering some 400,000 hectares where the Fitzroy and Margaret Rivers meet in the Kimberley, it was founded by the McDonald brothers 136 years ago and only stocked after the longest cattle drive in history – a three-and-half year, 5600km test of willpower that started near Goulburn in NSW.

Annette Henwood, a direct descendant of the founding family, agreed to sell Fossil Downs to Mrs Rinehart ahead of other WA billionaires Andrew Forrest and Kerry Stokes in 2015 because she trusted her to uphold its history and to look after priceless artifacts that include the water bag carried on the cattle drive.

Mr Forrest and Mr Stokes have both since added to their significant interests in agriculture, but they are dwarfed by Hancock Prospecting's rise to one of the biggest privately-owned cattle companies in the world and its partnership with Shanghai CRED in the \$386.5 million purchase of S Kidman & Co in 2016.